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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PORT AU PRINCE 000537

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SUBJECT: HAITI ELECTIONS: MORE ASSURANCES BUT FEW CONCRETE
ACHIEVEMENTS

REF: PORT AU PRINCE 377

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Classified By: Ambassador Janet A. Sanderson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)
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11. (C) Summary: President Preval at the end of March again reassured the international community of the GOH's commitment to hold Senate elections. The Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) announced to donors an increase of USD 2 million in the projected cost of elections, but has still not presented a written budget. The CEP continues to focus on obtaining greater resources for its own operations, and has done little by way of concrete preparations for the Senate elections. A bicameral commission in the parliament continues to study the electoral law, although passage before the end of April is improbable. Given the time needed between the passage of the law and election day, reasonable projections place Senate elections in September at the earliest. End summary.

President Convenes Ambassadors, CEP

12. (C) President Preval called Core Group ambassadors, MINUSTAH, and the CEP to a meeting at the Palace March 31. Preval emphasized his dedication to elections, stating repeatedly that Haiti will have elections and that he wants them to take place as soon as possible. Preval also stated that this would be the last elections meeting hosted by the Presidency, and that he had asked Prime Minister Alexis to take over the portfolio and to designate a liaison to the CEP from the PM staff. Preval also asked the international community to help the CEP accomplish its task. (Note: MINUSTAH's Chief of Electoral Assistance, Marc Plum, speculated to Poloff that Preval's speech to the donors was a veiled message to the CEP to ''get to work,'' and that the President had tired of supervising and prodding them himself. End note.)

13. (C) During the Palace meeting, CEP President Frantz-Gerard Verret announced that the CEP had revised the electoral budget upwards, to USD 15 million from USD 13 million. Verret stated that since the international community wants so badly to support elections, they should

provide the money to fill the gap. The budget increase is mostly allocated to salaries of departmental and communal electoral councils (USD 1.5 million). The CEP also added to the budget additional money for voter registration (USD 300,000), four deputies to the CEP Director General (USD 36,000), and funding to pay 900 election workers to assist 'elderly, handicapped, and pregnant voters' on election day (USD 54,000). (Note: MINUSTAH's Plum said salaries of departmental and communal electoral councils should be paid out of the CEP's regular operating budget. He noted that it is unclear whether the Ministry of Finance had released those funds to the CEP as delineated in the FY2008 national budget. End note.) Preval did not distribute the electoral budget during the meeting as was expected; Plum reported that the CEP gave the budget to Preval just one hour prior to the meeting, and that therefore the President was not prepared to distribute it to the donors. (Note: UN SRSG Hedi Annabi told Ambassador he is 'not concerned' about the budget increase or that the international community still has not seen a written election budget. End note.)

Electoral Council Still Lacking Focus

14. (C) Marc Plum, MINUSTAH's Chief of Electoral Assistance says that the CEP councilors are wholly focused on the administrative functioning of the CEP and have yet to start planning the senatorial elections themselves. Plum told Poloff April 3 that the CEP had 'sent the Presidency a shopping list,' asking for more offices, cars and security, and that the CEP was declining to move into substantive organization of the elections before those needs were met. MINUSTAH and UNDP have made several offers to the CEP to begin working with them daily on election logistics, but the CEP rejected these overtures. CEP Director General Pierre-Louis Opont (reftel) has complained to MINUSTAH that

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the councilors are not consulting him before taking action, making it difficult for him to regulate the CEP budgets. Plum said he had seen indications that the relationship between the councilors and the DG is already deteriorating. Plum predicted elections would not be possible before the end of September.

International Community, CEP Begin Regular Roundtables

15. (C) Major donors met with the CEP March 5 in an attempt to 'kickstart' the electoral process. The roundtable included the President and Director General of the CEP as well as representatives from Canada, Brazil, the European Commission, MINUSTAH, UNDP and the OAS. The CEP was unable to provide a current budget or timeline for the senatorial elections, but promised to have the documents available at the next roundtable (currently scheduled for April 14). CEP President Verret then noted that the CEP planned to add to the draft election budget presented to them by MINUSTAH increased funding for publicity and civic education, before submitting the CEP's election budget to President Preval. (Note: Clearly, Verret's statements do not match the budget presented to the Presidency March 31. End note.) Several donors questioned the CEP's plan for electoral observers, a point Verret admitted the CEP had not yet addressed. Verret noted that the CEP had initiated rehabilitation of the vote tabulation center in Port-au-Prince.

16. (SBU) OAS Special Representative Ambassador Arthur Gray reported that with OAS technical assistance, Haiti's Office of National Identity (ONI) has registered 515,000 new voters since reopening registration in August 2007. He was confident that ONI would be able to pass voter rolls to the CEP in a timely fashion, despite lingering uncertainty about coping with voters who had moved and those that turn 18 between the closing of voter registration and election day.

Election Financing

¶17. (C) Donors agreed in February to pool election funds into a new UNDP trust fund similar to that used for the 2006 and 2007 elections. UNDP Governance Chief Pierre-Antoine Archange told Emboffs in February that UNDP was finalizing a project document to be signed by donor countries and the GOH granting UNDP permission to manage the funds. (Note: As of April 4, USAID had still not received a draft of the document promised by UNDP. End note.) Archange said UNDP would have no difficulty dedicating the USG contribution to the UNDP trust fund (USD 3 million) solely to electoral materials. Prior to the CEP's increase to the estimated budget, UNDP noted that pledges from the USG, Canada and the European Commission, along with the GOH contribution and funds remaining in the preexisting trust fund, were sufficient to cover the USD 13 million estimated cost. USAID reports that Mexico, Switzerland, Spain and Japan are interested in giving small amounts of money, ranging from USD 100,000 to 200,000.

Electoral Law in Parliament

¶18. (SBU) Parliament in March formed a bicameral committee, chaired by Senate Justice Committee chairman Youri Latortue (Artibonite in Action/Artibonite) and Chamber of Deputies Justice Committee Chairman Arsene Dieujuste (MOCHRENA/Gonaives, Artibonite), to study and edit the electoral law. The bicameral committee is working on the law and expects to issue its initial findings the week of April 17. Subsequently, both Chambers will have to pass the law during a formal session. The commission met with major political parties March 18 and has since received written comments on the law from almost all participating parties. OPL President Edgar LeBlanc told Poloff March 18 that OPL's two principal preoccupations about the electoral law are the fair location and distribution of voting centers and finding an objective method to carry out redistricting. LeBlanc predicted parliament would pass the law by end of April.

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¶19. (C) Comment: We are encouraged by parliament's progress with the electoral law. Getting both houses of parliament to vote on the bill will be the most challenging step in the process, given how easily parliamentarians succumb to distractions. More disconcerting is the lack of commitment shown by the CEP to organizing and carrying out the elections. CEP President Verret has demonstrated considerable naivete, both about the electoral process as well as donor relations, and can cite very few accomplishments since his December inauguration. The earliest possible date for elections has now slid to August, though MINUSTAH's prediction of late September is more likely.
SANDERSON